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UNCLAS TUNIS 001093

SIPDIS

STATE FOR ECA/PE/V/R/N (KOTOB/MOODY); NEA/PPD (GLAZIER);
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Media IV Program Positively Effects Tunisian
Journalist

1. SUMMARY: Abderraouf Mkadmi, an editor at the most widely-read and anti-American Tunisian daily newspaper, returned from the March "Role of the Media" program with profound respect for the American people. Mkadmi noted that, upon his return to Tunisia, he was struck at the negative ramifications that his paper's angry denouncement of U.S. policy could have on both the American and Tunisian societies, and he expressed a determination to use his newspaper to help distinguish between U.S. foreign policy and American society. END SUMMARY.

2. ACTIVITY: FY-05 RP "Role of the Media in the U.S."; EVDB Project number 2005-0007.

3. DATES: March 14 - April 1, 2005

4. OBJECTIVE: To give participants a better understanding of the special role that the media plays in the United States. In the case of Mr. Mkadmi, our goal was two-fold: to provide him insight into the importance of a free and responsible media and to bring him face-to-face with citizens of a country that is daily vilified in his newspaper.

5. MPP GOAL: Democracy and Mutual Understanding.

6. IMPACT: Outstanding. As mentioned, Mr. Mkadmi is an editor at the most widely-read and anti-American daily in Tunisia. His overwhelmingly positive experience in getting to know the American people and the opportunity to better understand the way that a responsible and free press can serve a government and its people profoundly affected his view of the U.S. and is shaping his work at his newspaper. He noted that, after this tour, he was almost embarrassed to acknowledge the sad state of the press in his country. Mr. Mkadmi was most impressed with the kindness and warmth of the American people. He recounted with emotion their attendance of a rodeo in Texas, during which the Americans present applauded and cheered when it was announced that there were Arab journalists present. Mr. Mkadmi also was deeply moved by the "humility" of all of the American people with whom they met. He noted that, regardless of the rank and stature of the interlocutor, all of the American officials or individuals with whom he met exhibited modesty and humility, and a genuine interest in learning about the Arab journalists's point of view.

7. CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: Mr. Mkadmi complimented the program organization. He enjoyed the home hospitality. He experienced no airport delays, and said that he completed entry formalities at Dulles in 15 minutes.

8. BRINGING LESSONS BACK HOME: Mr. Mkadmi shared his experiences with the over 80,000 Tunisian readers of his newspaper in a four-part series on his experience. While constrained by the anti-American editorial line of his paper, Mkadmi made a point of underlining positive aspects of American society such as the power of capitalism, the strength of American science and research, and the willingness of American people to engage with the Arab world. His determination to improve Tunisian views of the American people was exemplified in a recent editorial written in connection with the allegations of desecration of a Koran in Guantanamo. While other articles severely criticized the U.S., Mkadmi's article noted that it was important to remember that an Arab-American museum just opened in Michigan and argued that any decision to disrespect Islam was not reflective of the entire American society.

9. QUALITY OF ECA AND PROGRAM AGENCY SUPPORT: Excellent.

HUDSON